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AUTHOR Platt, Chester C.
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ABSTRACT

To determine whether changes in the type of research conducted by community colleges had taken place since 1968 and to ascertain the current research interests of these colleges, a national survey of community colleges was conducted. Questionnaires were sent to 1,150 public and private community and junior colleges, of which 40 percent responded. Nearly 90 percent of the responding colleges were public institutions. Sixty-three percent reported some type of institutional research, with 51 percent having formally organized research programs. Of the colleges reporting, 47 percent indicated institutional research budget increases. As compared with findings reported in an ERIC monograph, "Junior College Institutional Research: The State of the Art," published in 1968, the research categories popularity had changed in some instances. The category "Students" remained the most popular research interest; however, "Curricula and Programs" dropped from second place in the 1968 study to fifth place in the current study, with "Instruction" being the least popular category in both studies. In terms of research preference, there was little difference between past research activities and current projects, the most popular areas of research continuing to be students, student services, and institutional operations. Sixty-one percent of the colleges sometime involve their institutional research officers in important decisions, and 97 percent would like to exchange research ideas and methodologies. (DB)

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INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES: A NATIONAL SURVEY

by Chester C. Platt
Office of Institutional Research

During the Fall and Winter quarters of the 1973-74 academic year, the Office of Institutional Research at De Anza College conducted a national survey on institutional research in community colleges across the country. Part of the study was based on a national study which appeared as part of an ERIC monograph, Junior College Institutional Research: The State of the Art, published in 19...

Questionnaires were sent to 1150 public and private community and junior colleges using the AACJC's mailing list of both member and non-member institutions. Responses were received from forty percent of the colleges. Nearly 90% of the colleges responding (87%) were public. Eighty-three percent of the responding colleges reported enrollments of 6000 or less. Fifty-three percent reported enrollments of 2000 or less. A statistical summary of the responding institutions may be found in tables 1a and 1b.

TABLE 1a. SUMMARY OF PUBLIC & PRIVATE TWO-YEAR COLLEGES RESPONDING TO NATIONAL SURVEY

Type of institution	Number	Percentage
Public community colleges	393	87
Private junior colleges	56	13
Total	450*	

*One respondent failed to record whether his institution was public or private

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TABLE 1b. DISTRIBUTION OF COLLEGES RESPONDING BY ENROLLMENT

Enrollment	Number	Percentage
0 - 2000	237	53
2001 - 6000	133	30
6001 - 10,000	40	9
10,000 +	40	9

Of the total number of colleges responding to this survey, 63% reported some type of institutional research. Slightly over half (51%) of the colleges reported that they had formally organized research programs. Thirty-nine percent of the colleges indicated that their district had an institutional research program.

The resources which community colleges are willing to commit to institutional research present a mixed picture. Nineteen percent of those colleges which conduct research reported budgets of $30,000 or above (including salaries). Twenty-four percent reported institutional research budgets of between $20,000 and $30,000. But, 35% of the colleges conducting research reported budgets of $10,000 or less. Some encouragement should probably be drawn from these figures since they reveal that 43% of the colleges have research budgets of over $20,000. Also, since 53% of the colleges responding to this survey have enrollments of 2000 or less, it would be unusual to find institutions of this size committing large sums for research. Moreover, budgets for institutional research appear to be on the rise in the majority of the community colleges which participated in the study. Thirteen percent of the institutions with research programs reported that their institutional research budget increased sharply over the

past three years. Forty-seven percent reported budget increases, and only seven percent of the responding colleges indicated a decline in the research budget. Moreover, just over three-fourths (76%) of the community colleges which conduct research reported that they had at least one professional staff member engaged in institutional research on a full-time basis.

A primary purpose of this project was to determine if any changes in the types of research which community colleges conduct have taken place since the ERIC study in 1968. To this end, the same research categories, originally used for the ERIC study, were employed in this study with the exception of the category "other" for which we substituted "Continuing Education". They are listed below:

Students	student characteristics, designated groups of students (transfer, career and vocational, remedial, probationary, dropouts, etc.), performance on tests, reading, mathematics ability, etc.
Faculty	teaching effectiveness, faculty backgrounds, loads, salaries, training and development, etc.
Instruction	instructional media, materials, techniques.
Continuing Education	day, extended day, evening programs, growth studies, evaluation, use of television.
Curricula & Programs	curriculum and program development, content and evaluation, including special programs.
Student Services	counseling and guidance, graduate and part-time placement, student facilities.
Institutional Operations	accreditation, long & short range planning, space and personnel utilization, etc.

The ERIC Study found the category "Students" was the most popular research interest. The colleges responding to this survey indicated that the category "Students" remains the number one research interest. Thirty-seven percent of the colleges which have institutional research programs reported doing four or more such studies within the past two years; 55% reported doing between

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one and four student studies. A major change occurred in the second most popular category of research. Results of the ERIC survey revealed "Curriculums and Programs" to be ranked second, but in our study "Institutional Operations" moved from third to second. "Curriculums and Programs" dropped to fifth in popularity. "Instruction" remained the least popular category of institutional research. Forty percent of the colleges with research programs reported no such studies within the past two years.

Some tentative conclusions might be drawn from these results. One might speculate that as enrollments in many areas of the country level off or decline, community colleges are becoming more interested in studying their teaching effectiveness, their students, and their overall efficiency.

Table 2. AREAS OF COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGE RESEARCH EMPHASIS RANKED BY THE FREQUENCY OF STUDIES IN THE PAST 2 YEARS
(Figures in percentages)
(*n = 282)

1968 ERIC Rank	1973 Rank	Research Area	Total percentage of colleges which conducted research in this area	Percentage completing 1 to 4 studies	Percentage completing 4 or more studies
1	1	Students	92	55	37
3	2	Institutional Operations	89	65	24
4	3	Faculty	82	64	18
5	4	Student Services	77	63	14
2	5	Curricula & Programs	75	60	15
**	6	Continuing Education	64	57	7
7	7	Instruction	60	51	9

*This n equals the total number of community and junior colleges which conduct institutional research.

**This category was not used in the ERIC study of 1968.

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Next, the current research interests of these colleges were surveyed. Institutions were requested to indicate the number of research projects underway in each area of research.

TABLE 3. CURRENT RESEARCH IN COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGES

Rank	Area	Percentage of colleges with 1 or 2 active projects	Percentage of colleges with 2 to 4 active projects	Total percentage with active research projects
1	Institutional Operations	60	17	77
2	Students	50	26	76
3	Student Services	51	12	63
4	Faculty	49	11	60
5	Curricula & Programs	43	13	56
6	Continuing Education	40	5	45
			n = 282	

N.B. Percentages here are lower than in Table #2 since the data refer to projects which were currently active at the time the questionnaire was completed.

In terms of research preference, there was little difference between past research activities and current projects. The most popular areas of research continue to be students, students services, and institutional operations. The area of faculty research dropped from third to fourth in popularity. This might be considered surprising since there is a current wave of interest among community and junior colleges in teacher effectiveness and in faculty develop-

ment programs.

The table below indicates that relatively few institutions (15%) base important decisions routinely on the results of institutional research. The figures further reveal that only 24% of community college institutional research officers are routinely approached with a problem which might be solved with the aid of institutional research. It was somewhat encouraging to learn that 61% of the colleges sometimes involve thier institutional research officers in important decisions.

Table 5. IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH TO TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

A. To what extent does the college base its most important decisions on the results of institutional research?

Routinely	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
23 (15)	61 (40)	15 (10)	01 (.004)

B. How often is the research office approached with a problem which might be solved with the aid of institutional research?

Routinely	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
24 (15)	61 (38)	13 (08)	02 (.008)

N.B. Figures in parentheses indicate the percentage of the total number of colleges responding while the first figures indicate the percentage of colleges which actually conduct research.

Forty-three percent of the questionnaires received from community and junior colleges which actually conduct institutional research were completed by institutional research officers, 19% were completed by presidents or superintendents, and 22% were filled out by deans of instruction.

Finally, almost all (97%) of the colleges which conduct research would like to exchange research ideas and methodologies. This indicates that there is a critical need for some new type of research exchange. As part of this survey, institutions were asked to submit the name of the individual to whom research inquiries should be addressed. An institutional research mailing list

is currently being completed at De Anza College. We hope to mail copies to each community and junior college which responded to the survey or, failing this, to publish it so that the mailing list will be available to all.

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